

VA**U.S. Department
of Veterans Affairs**

News Release

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Washington, D.C. -- On May 31, Memorial Day will be commemorated by the Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) in a number of ceremonies and observances to be held at national cemeteries and other VA facilities.

Secretary of Veterans Affairs Togo D. West, Jr., said, "The blessings of our nations liberty and prosperity are directly related to the selfless sacrifices of millions of members of our Armed Forces throughout our history. Many paid the ultimate price and it is incumbent on a grateful nation to take time this Memorial Day and every day to honor our nations defenders."

Thousands of veterans and family members will gather with local veterans and community organizations for Memorial Day programs at VAs 115 national cemeteries, including:

- Keokuk, Iowa
- Long Island at Farmingdale, N.Y.
- Florida at Bushnell
- Fort Logan, Colo.
- Fort Mitchell, Ala.
- Golden State at San Bruno, Calif.
- Santa Fe, N.M.
- West Virginia at Grafton

Many cemeteries will display American flags provided by families of deceased veterans as part of VA's "Avenue of Flags" tradition. Ceremonies also are planned at VA medical centers, outpatient clinics and regional benefits offices across the country.

Also in conjunction with Memorial Day, VA medical centers and veterans readjustment counseling centers will unveil a new rose dedicated to the Nations veterans. The dark red Veterans Honor Hybrid Tea Rose, developed by Jackson Perkins, the worlds largest rose company, will be planted at VA medical facilities during May 27 special ceremonies. The new rose will be dedicated as a living and lasting tribute to the service and sacrifice of members of the U.S. armed forces.

Jackson Perkins has donated Honor rose bushes for planting ceremonies at VA medical and counseling facilities. The company has pledged 10 percent of the proceeds from sales of the rose to VAs medical research program, which supports more than 7,000 investigators working on more than 15,000 projects primarily in clinical settings throughout VAs health-care system.

The Memorial Day tradition began with recognition of the war dead after the Civil War, when flowers were placed on the graves of Union and Confederate soldiers. In 1959, Congress proclaimed the day be set aside as a day of prayer for permanent peace in recognition of those Americans who died in service to their country. Memorial Day was observed on May 30 until 1971, when Congress decreed that it be observed annually on the last Monday in May.